

## Goodbye with Gratitude and Sincere Piety

Written by Erika Vizcarra

Thursday, 31 December 2009 00:00

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"We must be grateful to everyone and everything that crosses our path at every moment of every day and live every second, every day, every month and every year ahead of us with a heart filled with utmost sincere piety. Let us greet the new year with the same piety and pray that the new year be peaceful, auspicious, and one filled with blessings and wisdom." – [Master Cheng Yen](#)

Commemorating the triumphs it gained over the many challenges it faced in the year 2009, Tzu Chi Foundation, Philippines held its Yearend Blessing Ceremony last January 31, 2010 with utmost gratitude for the wisdom and virtuosity of founder Master Cheng Yen that guided them through their trials and tribulations.

Attended by 1540 of its long-term and short-term beneficiaries, donors, affiliate groups, friends and other guests, the auditorium of the Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall in Quezon City was filled with thankfulness and hope for a better year ahead as 187 Tzu Chi volunteers recalled their bitter and sweet experiences in the past year.

Through the 17-minute video presentation of the Philippine 2009 Great Treasury Sutra, the audience was once more reminded of the goodness and great love that Tzu Chi has bestowed in thousands of needy people in the country.

### **Transformations unfolded**

One of the most unforgettable experiences that Tzu Chi went through last year was at the height of Typhoon 'Ondoy' ( [Ketsana](#) ). While most of the Tzu Chi volunteers were also affected by the deluge, their love and care for their fellowmen was still prevalent as they pushed forth in helping the hardest hit areas recover from their misfortunes.



Among these areas was Marikina City where hundreds of thousands of residents lost home and even loved ones during the typhoon. However, Master Cheng Yen's wisdom and unbounded love for the Filipinos guided the Tzu Chi volunteers in reinforcing relief programs in the city in October.

A short drama presentation titled "Love Heals the World" from Tzu Chi volunteers and 18 typhoon-survivors-turned-volunteers from Marikina City showed how Tzu Chi's rehabilitation efforts helped with the recovery of the three hard-hit barangays of Nangka, Malanday and Tumana.

Through the relief work (cash-for-work) program, the normalcy of these barangays were brought

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back as the residents were paid Php400 (USD8.6) daily for about three weeks to clean their mud-laden communities.

"I did not know what to do at that time. We did not know where to ask help from but when Tzu Chi came and implemented the relief work program, my spirit was uplifted. In return, I helped with the preparations of the prayer vigil at the Marikina Sports Center. When I saw the large number of people who came that day (December 27), I realized how big Tzu Chi's help really is. We will truly never forget what Tzu Chi has done to help us recover. As a way to give back their kindness, I vow to help my fellowmen, harbour a good heart and decent behaviour, and help protect the environment," shared Barangay Nangka resident Danilo Tabano, 66, to the audience.

Tabano also recalled that they had to move atop their two-storey house when the typhoon struck and had nothing to take shade from the heavy rainfall except the blankets he had saved.

Fellow Nangka resident, Joann Casero, 40, also attested to the good transformation that she underwent after she met Tzu Chi. "Before, I used to gamble, drink and go out with my buddies a lot. But when Tzu Chi came, I told my friends that I want to stop from all the bad things I've been doing and instead join Tzu Chi's activities. The first time I was able to volunteer in one of Tzu Chi's relief missions, I felt really good. Even though I did not have any material or monetary contribution, I felt really glad in helping Tzu Chi volunteers hand out aid to others," the mother of three declared.

During Tzu Chi's relief work program program in Nangka, Casero was one of the people whom Tzu Chi volunteers tasked to handle the disaster relief workers. Now, Casero is one of the Marikeños who actively participate in the missions of Tzu Chi. She is also currently employed as a cook in Tzu Chi's office in Sta. Mesa, Manila.

"I am pledging that I will continue serving Tzu Chi throughout my entire life. I am not asking for anything in return and expect that I am always with you (Tzu Chi volunteers) in helping others in need," Casero declared.

Casero also shared that her children used to complain on her frequent absence from home but now, even though their mother is still out of the house most the time, they are happy to see her engaged in Tzu Chi works. Casero's husband is presently working in Saudi Arabia and when he heard about the news that she is now working in Tzu Chi, he was elated.

Seeing this positive change amongst the Marikina residents, Tzu Chi volunteers could not help express their happiness.

"Without Master Cheng Yen's wisdom, all of us would not be here right now. It is her advice that we implement a relief work program in Marikina that freed the city from mud and garbage," one Tzu Chi volunteer pronounced.

The Tzu Chi volunteer also stressed the Master's call for everyone to harbour a pious heart in times of disasters and seize every chance to give help to others. In this light, the volunteers

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showed the 20-minute video presentation of Tzu Chi's Great Treasury Sutra 2009 that exhibited Tzu Chi's footprints of love worldwide.

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### **Million grains of rice make a bushel; million drops of water make a river**

Among the attendees of the day's event were residents of Barangay Tatalon, Quezon City who was aided by Tzu Chi after suffering from both flood and fire disasters during typhoon 'Ondoy's' onslaught on September 26.

Tzu Chi volunteers were the first to help them the day after the disasters by providing them hot meals and other material necessities like footwear and clothes. Tzu Chi furthered its relief efforts in the Tatalon community by distributing relief supplies and cash assistance to hundreds of families and reinforcing clean-up operations in the entire neighbourhood.

Tzu Chi volunteers, however, were the ones much grateful for the residents of Tatalon who gave them a surprise visit during Tzu Chi Philippines' 15th anniversary celebration. Nearly 200 Tatalon residents set out on foot to the nearby Tzu Chi office that day of November 8 to give the coin cans they had previously adopted.

Despite their recent miseries, the residents of Tatalon displayed their selflessness and kindness through the coins they have saved up to donate to Tzu Chi. Their donations amounted to Php34,000 (USD733).

"That day was truly unforgettable. That was the first time in 15 years that we received such a meaningful gift. You made all of us Tzu Chi volunteers really happy," one Tzu Chi volunteer happily said.

Ruth Gonzales, 30, was among those 200 people from Barangay Tatalon who gave donations to Tzu Chi in its 15th anniversary celebration. Gonzales was very delighted to hear the Tzu Chi volunteer's remark and proudly stood up when they were called by the volunteer in the middle of his speech.

"I am happy. It feels really good to give help to others. It's our way of paying forward the support we received from Tzu Chi. Even though we were not able to equal the large scale of aid that Tzu Chi provided us, I know that our small contributions will add up to a large amount and will be able to give help to many people in need," Gonzales, a mother of two, said.

According to Gonzales, the timely aid that Tzu Chi gave the day after the storm has really helped them start their life. She said that they used the money she got to buy her children their needs for school as all of their possessions have been washed away along with their house. She added that the relief items such as thermal blanket, sleeping mat and other household

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needs were truly useful in such time when they had to sleep outside for a month.

"I am very thankful for the prompt aid that you (Tzu Chi) have offered. The things you gave proved to be beneficial as we were really penniless at that time. Here in Tzu Chi, I witnessed that there is no racial and religious prejudices and they do not choose the people they help. While others discriminate people who have different religious faith from theirs, Tzu Chi disregards differences and just helps all the people in need. Whatever your skin color, social status or religion is, Tzu Chi's respect is always there that is why Tzu Chi is really the best," Gonzales, a follower of Jehovah's Witness faith, tearfully said.

Gonzales had even brought two coin cans that day to be given to Tzu Chi. She said that she and her husband deposit not just 25 centavos but several peso coins everyday.

"The Master said that by dropping a coin everyday, you are doing one act of goodness," Gonzales explained.



Tzu Chi volunteers then proceeded to hand out red envelop of blessing and wisdom to the attendees. These red packets are Master Cheng Yen's blessing of wisdom to the public. Each packet contains an image of the Buddha, which symbolizes inspiration and reminder to take care of the environment; six grains of rice that represent the Six Paramitas or ways of practicing the dharma, which according to Buddhist teachings, are the traits a person must have in order to attain the mind's purity; and a one-peso coin that embody the affinity between the Tzu Chi volunteers and their beneficiaries, donors and friends.

"I will treasure this and use this as an inspiration in helping my fellow-being," Gonzales said.

Before receiving her red envelop, Lita Mergano was among the hundreds of people who lined up to pour their donations into the two jars placed at the center of the auditorium.

Mergano is a 60-year-old lady who lives alone in a small shanty in Barangay Escopa, Quezon City. Her husband was killed by their drug-addict son in 2008, the latter being in Quezon City Jail at present. Their youngest daughter was also addicted to drugs and has committed suicide years ago whereas their two daughters are both married and residing in Cebu and Pangasinan.

In December 2008, Mergano was bumped by a jeepney and sustained injuries in her head and foot. Her injuries were treated but she was not able to sustain her medications because of her poverty.

Mergano earns a living by buying and selling marked up old shoes but this small business does not give her regular income. In early 2009, Tzu Chi adopted her as a long-term care recipient and is given multivitamins, 10 kilos of rice and cash allowance of Php1,000 monthly.

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Despite her meagre income, Mergano is still able to put as much as Php500 (USD10.7) worth of coins in her Tzu Chi coin bank.

"When Tzu Chi helps me, they do so without any qualms. That is why I also don't have regrets when I give help to others by saving up coins in the coin bank," Mergano said.

"I am very thankful to Tzu Chi because they saved my life. The help they are giving me is really of great value. I pray that Tzu Chi will grow even bigger and that my life will extend so that I could help other people," Mergano said.

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### **Heeding to our Nature's call**

During the afternoon session for Tzu Chi's Chinese friends, donors and guests, Tzu Chi volunteers once more honoured Master Cheng Yen and the wisdom she bestowed upon them in helping Marikina stand up from its unfortunate condition.

Like in the first session, the audience was reminded by the Master in paying attention to the call of Mother Nature, who has been bringing disaster after disaster, through a short video clip of her talk.

"Nature is teaching us a lesson the hard way. Let us take the lessons by heart and be more vigilant," the Master said.

In light of the most recent tragedy in Haiti, the Master's call for everyone to love and cherish Mother Earth since our survival depends on it resounded in the gathering.

The volunteers also led the attendees to a prayer for peaceful and disaster-free world as they lighted up their candles and the lamps in their hearts as they made good vows for 2010.

One of those who made a vow of spreading the seeds of Tzu Chi's love through her profession is Cherilyn Ngo, a Tzu Chi volunteer since 2003 and also a reporter for local newspaper, Philippine Chinese Daily.

Ngo shared her experience and enlightenment after she was able to go with 28 local media delegates in a tour to Tzu Chi's headquarters in Taiwan last December 18-20, 2009.

"When I went to Taiwan, I learned a lot of things about Tzu Chi. I got to know more about the four Missions of the foundation, saw for myself the construction of the Great Love Village for the Morakot victims and most importantly, I saw Master Cheng Yen in person. I also witnessed how Tzu Chi volunteers show their love to other people. All of these greatly affected my work as a reporter and has moved me to spread news about Tzu Chi to the readers."

Ngo added that her trip to Taiwan was more meaningful for her because aside from being a member of the local media, she is also a volunteer. Ngo has made a three-part story about the said tour in early January.

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As a parting gift, Tzu Chi volunteers gave each attendee a bag of succulent apple and orange fruits symbolizing peace and goodness, respectively, together with a copy of the Tzu Chi Publication and one booklet of the Jing Si aphorisms from Master Cheng Yen to guide them on their daily lives as 2010 sets in.

"May each family be safe and each day peaceful. Best wishes to you all," Master Cheng Yen uttered during her talk.